



Governor Terry E. Branstad
Lt. Governor Kim Reynolds
San Wong, Director

Iowa Commission on the Status of African Americans
Quarterly Meeting
December 5, 2014
Evelyn K. Davis Center for Working Families
801 University Ave
Room 129
Des Moines, IA

Call to order:

Meeting called to order at 1:05 pm by Chair Clair Rudison

Roll call:

Present: Clair Rudison, Rita Davenport, Kenneth Morris, Madai Taylor, Kimberly Wayne, Lynn Sutton (conference call), Bryan Burton (conference call)

Absent: San Wong, Ex-officio

Staff: Heidi Smith, Kim Cheeks, Alba Perez

Visitors:

Doyle Landry – Positive Vision
Lee Rood – Des Moines Register Reporter

Approve Minutes:

Bryan Burton motioned to approve the minutes of August 1, 2014, second by Sutton, approved unanimously.

Financial Report:

Heidi Smith commented on budget as of October 31, 2014, salaries plus benefits for CAS division.

Public Comment:

1. Doyle Landry – Positive Vision, he referred to comments made in Aug. 1 minutes that there has been no answer about the status report of the \$300,000 that was rejected by the Governor for the African American Museum.



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2. Lee Rood – Des Moines Register, noted she had been invited by Mr. Landry to attend the meeting today. She is interested in the police issues in Iowa and invited facts that can be proven. She mentioned a meeting that was held in October by the City of Des Moines.
3. Landry noted strong employment recruitment efforts by the Des Moines Public Schools

Old Business

Reports

Director:

Smith reported on behalf of Director Wong; on February 26, 2015 will be Capitol Day on the Hill for the Department of Human Rights. The tentative schedule:

7:00 – 9:00 am Legislative Meet and Greet Reception
9:00 am – 12:00 pm Commission Meetings
12:00 – 1:00 pm Lunch
1:00 – 3:00 pm DHR Board Meeting
3:00 – 5:00 pm DHR Open House

Smith reminded commissioners of the following:

- 1) Memo regarding commissioners receiving correspondence in their official capacity are official documents, should be forwarded to the DHR employee responsible for maintaining records for your commission, and can be a public record. If you have questions, refer to document titled HANDOUT REGARDING CORRESPONDENCE to Board Members & Commissioners, Department of Human Rights from Laura Cathelyn, Assistant Attorney General.
- 2) If you approached by the media for a statement to clarify if you are stating your personal opinion and not the view of the commission.
- 3) Business cards are not being printed for commission members but you are able to get a name tag.

Smith informed the commission that she had submitted her resignation and her last day would be December 12. She is moving to Minnesota and will be the executive director of an occupational rehabilitation center. Any questions about public information would be handled by Monica Stone who started employment on Dec. 1st replacing Danielle Plogmann.



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Office:

Written report submitted. Cheeks shared 2015 Martin Luther King Celebration will be held on Monday, January 19, 2015 beginning at 10:45 am. The program would include the traditional bell-ringing, comments from the Governor and Lt. Governor, a keynote speech, award presentations, and entertainment. Also shared former Administrator Abraham Funchess, Jr. has published a book "RISE!" and is for sale.

Commissioners:

Burton:

Also mentioned book by Abraham Funchess, Jr. Said he had been really busy and not very active in speaking with constituents for the past couple of months. He has been working with the Human Rights Commission on dealing with issues regarding law enforcement and the police. He will submit a written report.

Sutton:

She has been working in the healthcare area with issues affecting African American people that need help most are not going to facilities. Working on an awareness campaign with college students; farm to table, gardening, and healthier eating habits.

Taylor:

He continues to visit with inmates at Fort Dodge Correctional facility. His interests still lie with the high incarceration rate in Iowa.

Morris:

Shared that he is working with the Cedar Rapids School District (CRSD) on an initiative for recruiting and retaining teachers in the Iowa City, Cedar Rapids corridor. He also is involved in another initiative targeted for African American students to visit Iowa Colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU's) during spring break in March. Scholarships offered by CRSD.



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Wayne:

Submitted a written report. Shared in October she attended a youth enrichment program for STEM. She is a member of the Iowa Regional STEM Advisory Board formed by Governor Branstad and they also met October. In November she visited the Science Center of Iowa No Zone mentoring program with hardly any African American youth in attendance. They also mentioned the lack of people of color visiting the Science Center.

Discussion ensued about partnering with different institutions and organizations to boost attendance, lack of enough staff / spots, and expanding pre-school offerings.

Davenport:

Submitted a written report. She continues to study the issue of African Americans access to higher education and completion rates. Proprietary lending targeted toward for profit colleges and students not able to pay back student loans. Noted that Iowa College Student Aid Commission has a tool that determines the feasibility of financial loans for students and how to disseminate the information to the community. She informed the commission of the recent press release regarding the recommendations in the Community and Strategic Plan (CASP) report addressing the disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system.

Taylor commented that need for blacks in Iowa to become a political force to make any headway on these issues that plague the community.

Rudison:

Submitted a written report. Expressed that he thinks it is a shame that there were no funds available for ICSAA to send a representative to support the National African American Commission at the Congressional Black Caucus.

DHR board update – referenced the commission to study the 2014-2015 Priorities

He invited African American legislators to attend this meeting but none had responded to the invitation.

He also extended an invitation to special guest Nicole Porter, Director of Advocacy at The Sentencing Project.



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The following are practical suggestions for next steps from Ms. Porter: She would be willing to serve as a resource as the Commission works towards consensus on its 2015 legislative agenda:

- Implementation of Minority Impact Statements -- As you may know Iowa is considered a leader in the adoption of minority impact statements. Since the law changed in 2009, staff with the Legislative Services Agency have produced several minority impact statements. One next step might be to work with LSA staff to conduct a minority impact statement analysis on current laws to determine disparity and see if there is an opportunity to eliminate or modify racially disparate policies.
- Minority Impact Analysis in Discretionary Release Practices -- According to the 2013 annual report, the Iowa Parole Board, approved 1,103 work release applications and 3,967 paroles in FY2013 compared to 1,325 work releases and 4,015 paroles in FY2012. An additional 421 offenders were placed on special sentence parole after discharging an underlying sex offense. A next step in addressing racial disparity could be to work with LSA staff to conduct a racial impact analysis on discretionary releases under the Parole Board's authority to determine if current practices involving release policies that disadvantage African American and Latino prisoners. A specific example is that in considering who is to be released under discretionary release policies, persons with prior records are often deemed ineligible. Due to high rates of contact for African American prisoners with law enforcement many have prior records at sentencing and may be ineligible for these release programs.
- Participation in Diversion and Specialty Court Programs -- These efforts can divert prison bound defendants into alternative programs that reduce re-offending. In many instances defendants with prior convictions are not eligible. For reasons cited earlier, African American defendants often have prior convictions due to trends in law enforcement practices. Nationally, Blacks are no more likely to use or sell drugs than whites, and yet they have a significantly higher rate of arrests. African Americans encompass 14 percent of regular drug users but are 37 percent of those who are arrested for drug crimes.

Prioritizing resources to expand publicly funded substance abuse diversion programs may also expand these efforts to African American and Latino defendants.

Due to limitations in publicly funded treatment options, there are fewer sentencing alternatives available to low-income defendants, who cannot afford to pay for treatment programs as an alternative to confinement.



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Some policies disadvantage lower income individuals, who are disproportionately people of color. Examples include risk assessments that require employment for pre-trial release, or probation or parole requirements to report at locations where there is little public transportation.

- Eliminating or Scaling Back Sentencing Statutes Known to have Racially Disparate Outcomes. Drug-free school zone laws mandate sentencing enhancements for people caught selling drugs near school zones. The expansive geographic range of these sentencing enhancements coupled with high urban density has disproportionately affected residents of urban areas, and particularly those in high-poverty areas – who are largely people of color. A study in New Jersey found that 95% of persons subject to these enhancements were African American or Latino. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have some form of drug-free school zone law. Iowa's policy is included in this briefing paper from 2013.

Iowa is also among a handful of states that continue to impose the crack-powder cocaine sentencing disparity. See report, with Iowa's policy. A measure known to have racially disparate outcomes. Equalizing the disparity would be a step in the right direction towards addressing racial disparity and bring Iowa in alignment with other states who don't have the sentencing disparity. In recent years Missouri, South Carolina, Ohio, and California worked to address crack-powder sentencing disparities for certain offenses.

New Business:

- 1) All the topics were discussed in commissioner reports.
- 2) Iowa Juneteenth Observance (Proposal on file)

Chris Johnson, General Chairman of the IJO, read a presentation/proposal to ICSAA explaining the history of the observance and requesting ICSAA consider transferring the IJO to ICSAA. The request with support by the Connect Foundation, who has spear-headed the growth of the observance for 24 years. They are hoping that a transfer would officially take place by June 30, 2015. Further discussion with ICSAA will take place in the future.

A question was asked on how to engage young African Americans to get involved in the political process? Young started an academy under the African American leadership forum, with training for 10 months of mentoring in politics. Perez mentioned the Latino Leadership Initiative (LLI).

Landry shared he attended the Des Moines Registers' Forum on October 2nd about Open Records Law and the Freedom of Information Act.



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Taylor commented that the political climate does not speak to African American issues.

Next meeting:

Dates for the next meeting will be sent to commission for consideration.

Adjourn:

Move to adjourn by Wayne, second by Taylor, approved unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kim Cheeks
Recorder